

## **Inventory of Organizations**

### ***Description***

It's no secret that working together makes people more effective than if each tries to do it all alone. But it's not usual for a community to have a full list of just what mechanisms it already has for working together. Associations, organizations, clubs, institutions, and even informally organized groups provide the framework for working together, and a community inventory can reveal a range of such instruments to be mobilized for CED. An inventory of organizations and the like, however, is more than just a list; with the appropriate detail it allows a CEDO to assess the potential of the local groups for tasks in the renewal process.

### ***Benefits***

An inventory assembles information on what organizations are already doing or can do for local economic development, their actual and potential links to outside resources, and their general contribution to community self-respect. An inventory may suggest that there is a dearth of organizational instruments for one or more constituencies in the community; and this will suggest opportunities to mobilize a new group.

Perhaps the most specific benefit is that a survey highlights possible formal partnerships for a CED strategy. Also, the organizations are a source of additional leaders to be turned onto the idea of contributing to CED, perhaps as new board members for your CEDO. In another setting, an inventory may reveal that in fact there is really no one organization in the community that is taking the responsibility for over-all community resilience and the necessary CED strategy - not even including initiatives for getting organizations to work together on these aims. That, of course, implies that people better start working on setting up that organization.

### ***Major challenges***

Probably the only major problem in designing and conducting an inventory is to make sure that you are not re-inventing the wheel. It is true that some local groups or organizations may not be very visible and yet have real potential for CED mobilization. But ordinarily there are lots of sources of information on the existence and characteristics of selected types of organizations. The task is to collect them and integrate them, not start over from scratch to do the research again.

***Some practical steps***

1. Establish or make use of an advisory board who will have access to very varied sorts of people and groups in the community, so you have the best chance not to overlook some groups or sources of information. The advisors should be helpful in becoming clear exactly what are the boundaries of the community in which the organizations are to be surveyed.
2. With the help of the advisory board, consider the outstanding community constituencies (that is, people of common interests, like sports enthusiasts, youth workers, religious councils, retail business owners, theatre lovers, minorities, or whatever) and determine the organizations that serve them - or the absence of such organizations for any significant constituencies.
3. Consider and decide what sorts of information you want about all organizations in the community, and whether for some you need different sets of data. This will depend upon how clear you are about how you want to use the inventory.
4. It will probably pay you to enter the data by computer, for easy access and for any updating.
5. After you have assembled your information, publicize the fact that you have it, so that others can make use of it and perhaps help to improve it, but also so that your CEDO gets recognition for its work.
6. Make sure that the inventory is effectively used by your CEDO, which means that all staff and board need to know fully what's in it and how to access it.

***Resource organizations & contacts***

The most helpful sources of orientation to using this strategy are likely to be the nearby communities that have carried out similar inventories.

***Publications***

- John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (distributed by ACTA Publications, 4848 No. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640) Two crucial chapters are “Releasing the Power of Local Associations and Organizations” and “Capturing Local Institutions for Community Building.”
- *Measuring Community Capacity Building: A Workbook-in-Progress for Rural Communities*, The Aspen Institute (Publications Office, P.O. Box 222, Queenstown, MD 21658). This workbook suggests the dimensions you might be interested in for assessing community organizational resources.